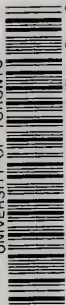



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THE
SCRIPTURE DOCTRINE
OF
SANCTIFICATION
STATED, AND DEFENDED
AGAINST THE
ERROR OF PERFECTIONISM.

BY

W. D. SNODGRASS, D. D.

“I have seen an end of all perfection.”—*Psalm* cxix. 96.

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PART I.

THE DOCTRINE OF SANCTIFICATION.



1 Thess. iv. 3. This is the will of God even your sanctification.

ALTHOUGH it is well to be familiar with the most comprehensive views which we can take of the nature and designs of the Christian system, there is also an advantage in setting ourselves at times to the examination of its particular parts. Considered as a whole, there is perfect unity, not only in the system itself, but in all its operations and fruits; but it is the unity of a body consisting of many members, or of a building composed of different stones. The parts are related; and each one occupies a place in the formation of the same great and consistent whole. But still, as compared among themselves, there is a difference between

them. And the more accurately we view them in detail, the more we shall appreciate them in their combined existence and in their several bearings upon the great end which they are intended to secure.

No attentive reader of the Bible can fail to notice, that among the parts which go to make up the system of faith and duty there revealed, a prominent place is assigned to what is called **SANCTIFICATION**. "This is the will of God," says the apostle, "even your sanctification." "Sanctify them through thy truth," says the Saviour, "thy word is truth." Heaven is represented as an "inheritance among them that are sanctified," and all true Christians are described as "they that are sanctified in Christ Jesus." Our first inquiry then shall be, What is Sanctification, as to its general nature, and in the relation which it sustains to the other parts of the Christian system?

In regard to the meaning of the word, we may say, that, while it has various significations in Scripture, there is no dispute as to its import in the passages which are quoted

above.—Sometimes, and especially in the phraseology of the Old Testament, to sanctify is nothing more than to set apart a person or thing from a common to a sacred use, by an external and visible dedication—in which sense the Jewish Temple and Priesthood, with all the furniture of the former, and all the garments of the latter, were said to be holy. They had no more real sanctity than other persons and things; but they were relatively holy, inasmuch as they were formally consecrated to the worship and service of God. In the New Testament, however, the word is generally used with an exclusive reference to persons; and, in its phraseology, to sanctify them is to make them really holy. This is the true and proper sense of the word; and we are thus to understand it in all those connexions in which it is used to describe the great change which must pass upon the moral character of man, before he can become a finished subject of the scheme of redemption by the gospel of Christ.

The necessity of such a change as this word imports, arises from the fact that the

state in which the Gospel finds us is an unholy state ; we are defiled, and need to be cleansed ; we are polluted, and need to be purified. And this fact will come before us in its true relations, if we advert for a moment to the two principal ways in which sin has affected us. In the first place, it has exposed us to punishment ; and has thereby affected us relatively—that is, in the relations in which we stand to the law and government of God. Instead of regarding us as innocent, he views us as guilty ; and, instead of having a title to his favor, we are liable to his wrath both here and hereafter. And, in the second place, it has brought our nature into a state of depravity or moral disorder, and has thereby affected us inherently. It has corrupted our moral character and constitution—it has alienated our affections from God—and brought us under the dominion of influences which are impure in their nature and tendency.—Now, it is with reference to the effects of sin in these two important respects, that the scheme of human redemption is constructed. It provides, through the

sacrifice and intercession of the great Mediator for so altering our relation to God and his law, that instead of being exposed to his wrath we have an interest in his favor. And to this department belongs all that the Scriptures teach in relation to forgiveness, justification, adoption, and a full and public acquittal in the day of judgment. But, in addition to this, it provides, through the office and mission of the Holy Spirit, for the rectification of our moral nature—for retracing upon us the image of God which has been defaced by sin—for restoring our moral powers to their right use and exercise—or for bringing us back, as an apostle describes it, to a state of “righteousness and true holiness.” And this department of the work is comprehended in what the Scriptures teach under the name of “Sanctification.” While the other is a work without us, this is a work within us. And the latter is quite as necessary as the former in securing the great end which the mediation of Christ has in view. For, of what advantage would it be to us to be pardoned and justified, unless we were

also sanctified or made holy? An unholy being could not be admitted to heaven; and, if it could, it would not be happy. Places and things are means and sources of happiness only to those in whom there exists a corresponding taste. That which is relished by one, may be distasteful to another, because their likings may run in different directions; their appetites may be different, and, for this reason, if they are to be gratified, they must be fed upon food of different kinds.—Nor is there any case in which the operation of this principle is more striking than in the one which we are now considering. Holy and unholy beings are at the widest possible extremes as to their moral tastes; and on this account, different and widely distant places are assigned them as their future and permanent abode. Heaven is the appointed habitation of the former. Hell will be the common receptacle of the latter. In heaven all will be holiness, without any admixture or proportion of sin. The place itself will be holy; all the inhabitants will be holy; and the same attribute will attach to its employ

ments and pleasures. There is nothing to enter there "that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination." So that, unless we are sanctified, there is a double reason why we cannot enter into the kingdom of God—we are not only excluded by a positive law of the kingdom itself; but we are excluded by a radical defect in our own nature. We must be assimilated in character and taste to the circumstances of the place, or heaven itself would be a hell to us. In short, there is no place of happiness for an unsanctified being in the universe of God.

As to the commencement of this necessary change, in the case of those who are finally fitted for heaven, it is referred to in the use of other words and phrases than those which mark its progress and completion. It is described, sometimes, as a second birth, sometimes as a passage from death unto life, sometimes as a new creation, and in one place it is called "regeneration." This differs from sanctification as the beginning of a thing differs from its continuance. And the relation of one to the other is clearly set forth

by an apostle, when he says, "He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." The author of the work is the same in all its parts. He who begins it is the same agent who carries it on; and we have no reason to suppose that the influence which is exerted in its progress is different from that which operates at the commencement. It is one work, and the efficient power which is concerned in producing it is one, but it consists of different stages or degrees. It is not perfect at once, but passes from an imperfect state to one which is more perfect. It is not instantaneous, but progressive. The "going forth" of God in its execution "is prepared as the morning," and he comes "as the rain, as the latter and former rain unto the earth." In regeneration, the day dawns and the day-star arises—the drops begin to fall which are an earnest of the approaching shower—and, as the light increases to the perfect day, and the drops multiply until the surface of the ground is saturated with water, so is the sanctification of the people of God. He acts towards

them as he did in ancient time towards the people of Israel. He does not drive out their enemies before them “in one day,” but “by little and little.” “Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,” they are “changed into the same image from glory to glory.”

In presenting it thus, it will be seen, that we regard sanctification as the work of God. And this view of its nature is demanded, as well by the obvious meaning of the word, as by the uniform teachings of Scripture in the use of other modes of expression. Sanctification is not synonymous with holiness—it is not the state of one who is made holy—but it is the act by which such a state is produced. It is the work of an efficient agent : and this agent is neither “blood,” nor “the will of the flesh,” nor “the will of man,” but “God.” “He that has wrought us for the self same thing is God.” And, while it is brought into view as the work of God in general, it is also represented as the work of each Person in the Godhead in particular. To the Father, we are directed to offer our supplications, that he would give us a new heart and a

right spirit, that he would circumcise our hearts to love and fear him, that he would sanctify us and make us perfect in every good work :—Of the Son, it is written, that “He gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works,” that he “suffered without the gate that he might sanctify the people with his own blood,” that he “loved the Church and gave himself for it that he might sanctify and cleanse it :”—And, as revealing the Spirit’s agency in the work, it is called the “sanctification of the Spirit,” is attributed to the pouring out of the Spirit, and is represented as a fruit of the Spirit.

But, while we regard it as the work of God, it is important in another view that we should regard it as the work and the duty of man. The subject of it is a rational and responsible agent. He is bound to be holy ; and nothing short of perfect holiness can answer to the measure of his obligations. The law of God, which is the rule of life to him, is the standard of holiness ; and, until this

standard is reached, he is properly dealt with in the use of arguments, exhortations, and motives. He has a duty to perform and a work to do ; and that is to follow holiness, to purify himself, to cleanse himself from all filthiness both of the flesh and of the spirit. In prosecuting this work, his reliance for success must be, on the Spirit of God working by appointed means. He must be active, yet he must not depend on himself. He must have recourse to meditation and prayer, to watchfulness and self-examination, to christian intercourse and counsel, and to all positive institutions, especially the reading and hearing of the word ; but, in all this, he must remember that the means are nothing without an influence from God to render them effectual. Their whole efficiency lies in the fact, that they are of God's appointment, and that he has promised to bless them. And hence, our only encouragement to be active in the use of means, is made to rest upon our knowledge of the interposition and the agency of God. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ; for

it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.”

Nor is there any inconsistency or confusion in the idea of these two agencies as working together in the production of the same result. They are not of the same kind ; the sphere of their operation is not the same ; one is efficient, the other instrumental. And, so accustomed are we to assign to each the place and position of a real agency, that we often ascribe the same event, sometimes to God, and sometimes to man. We say of an individual that he has risen from indigence to affluence, or from obscurity to distinction, by the Providence of God ; but we are not supposed to contradict ourselves, if we afterwards say, that he has succeeded by his own prudence, wisdom, and skill. Both statements are true, though in different senses. And accordingly they are both adopted by the sacred writers in reference to the work of sanctification. In one place, we are taught to call upon God to sanctify us ; in another, we are commanded to sanctify ourselves. One introduces God as promising us a new

heart and a right spirit, and another commands us to make to ourselves a new heart and a right spirit. And both these views are important in practice, as well as true and consistent in theory. We need the idea of human agency to incite us to activity; and we need the doctrine of Divine influence and efficiency to remind us of our dependence, to make us pray "without ceasing," and to secure the conviction that our salvation is "not of works," but of "grace." "Not by works, of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost."

This, then, as to its general nature, is sanctification; and these are the circumstances under which it may be expected to advance, considered both as the work of God and the duty of man.

PART II.

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION.



1 Thess. v. 23. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly.

THAT full provision is made for consummating the work of sanctification, as well as for its commencement and progress, is not doubted by any. All evangelical christians agree that when the Apostle says, "This is the will of God even your sanctification," he has in view the entire deliverance of those who embrace the Gospel from the power and pollution of sin. Christ "gave himself" for the Church, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it"—"that he might present it to himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing"—"that it should be holy and without blemish." This is the grand result which all the institutions

and influences of the Gospel have in view ; and, to entertain the apprehension of a failure here, would be to call in question the wisdom, the foresight, the veracity, and the faithfulness of God.

But the certainty of an event, and the time at which we are authorized to expect it, are two different things. And the question now arises, Are we authorized to believe that God will ever consummate the sanctification of his people within the limits of the present life ? Or, as the advocates of the doctrine of Perfection would prefer to have it stated,

Is entire sanctification in this life to be regarded as an attainable state ?

In entering upon the discussion of this question, it is all-important that the terms employed should be so defined that no confusion of ideas may exist as to their meaning. This is especially the case in reference to the word *entire* :—For, while the phrase ‘entire sanctification’ is one of frequent occurrence in the writings of those who defend the doctrine which is now current under this name, it is not so clear that they themselves

have a definite notion of what they intend to express, or adhere as closely as they should to what the words legitimately imply. We see the evidence of this in the fact, that the phrase in question is used as convertible with others which are plainly not identical in their meaning, either as compared with it or with one another. One of these phrases is, 'the consecration of our whole being to Christ.' And what does this imply, according to the true meaning and force of the words? May we not be consecrated to Christ and yet be sanctified only in part? Is not every Christian consecrated to him? And (if his being is capable of being divided into parts) does not the consecration extend to one part as well as to another? Another phrase is, 'the subjection of all our powers and susceptibilities to the control of faith on the Son of God.' But may not faith on the Son of God control those who are still in a measure under the influence of sin? Do not all who are recovered to "newness of life," live by faith on the Son of God? And are there any particular powers and susceptibili-

ties of our nature to which the influence of this faith extends more than to others?

But, not to dwell upon the vagueness of conception and expression which is betrayed in these and other instances of the same kind which might be quoted, let us inquire what a state of 'entire sanctification' ought fairly to be considered as implying. It is defined by a recent writer on Christian Perfection, as involving "perfect obedience to the moral law." It implies, he says, "a full and perfect discharge of our entire duty in respect to God and to all other beings." And, if this definition were allowed to stand unqualified and unimpaired, we should desire no other. But it falls out, in immediate connexion with this language, that the demands of the law of God upon us depend upon our "circumstances"—that "our powers are comparatively weak"—and that what is required of us is holiness, "corresponding with the reach of our powers." We are thus driven at once from what seemed to be safe and tenable ground, and thrown upon the radical error, that the extent of our powers, fallen as

we are, is the ground and measure of our obligation. Of course the powers referred to are the moral powers of our nature—those powers which have been affected by sin—and which are “weak” in us, as compared with the higher and more perfect condition in which they existed in the primitive state and constitution of man. And the necessary consequence of this position is, that, the more we sin and thereby debilitate our powers, the more circumscribed does the sphere of our duty become—or, in other words, that we are excusable for not meeting the requisitions of the law of God just in proportion as we advance in the career of rebellion against him. And, if there is either truth or safety in this position, then the shortest road to entire sanctification is the highway of sin. We have only to persevere in sin until our powers become so “weak” that we have no farther capability of obeying any part of the Divine law, and then we are sanctified to the full extent of our obligations; because our “circumstances” are such that we are under no obligation whatever.

But the law of God is not the sport of circumstances, as this absurd and dangerous position would imply. Other things may be susceptible of modification or change ; but this rule of conduct, like its glorious author, is “ the same yesterday, to-day and forever.” It makes the same demands upon devils that it does upon holy angels, and the same demands upon fallen man that it did upon man in his primitive state. It is nothing else than a declaration of injunctions which are in accordance with the perfections of God ; and, while these perfections continue to be what they are, he can accept of nothing as his law which is measured by a different standard or graduated by a different rule. And hence the care of the great Teacher to produce the impression upon the human mind that he had “ not come to destroy the law.” It was the same when he came into the world that it always had been ; and, instead of lowering the standard of obedience which it had erected, he made it his business to renew and ratify it by the disclosure of still more affecting and solemn sanctions. As left by him,

it required men, in view of a clearer revelation of 'eternal judgment' than had ever been made before, to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind, and with all their strength. To this law, then, we are amenable now. And, if there is any one among all our thoughts, words, or actions, which is not up to the standard of its requisitions—if we vary from them, in any one affection or emotion of soul—if we depart, for an instant, from the exercise of supreme affection for God, or unadulterated charity towards our fellow men—if there is about us the least taint of any thing like pride, unbelief, ingratitude, hardness of heart, impatience, discontent, impurity, earthly-mindedness, or covetousness—then we are not entirely sanctified. There is still a distance between us and the point at which we should aim:—Instead of congratulating ourselves that we have "already attained," we have reason to forget "those things which are behind" and to reach forth "unto those things which are before."

By entire sanctification, then, in the only

fair and consistent sense of the expression, we must understand perfect conformity both in letter and spirit to every part of that law which was originally written upon the heart of man—which was afterwards revealed to Israel on Mount Sinai—which is renewed and ratified in the teachings of the New Testament—and not only established and fulfilled, but magnified and made honourable, in the mediation of Christ.

And here I take occasion to say, that sanctification to the full extent of what this law requires, would be a state of holiness admitting of no progression or higher degrees.—Some, perhaps, may regard this as self-evident, and therefore as unworthy of being repeated; but there is a phase of the error we are about to consider which renders the remark important. Its friends insist that holiness may be perfect “in kind,” or “in its nature,” but be “finite in degree.” And, as illustrating this distinction, we are referred to the difference between the holiness of a child, and the holiness of a man—between the holiness of a saint on earth, and the holi-

ness of a seraph in heaven. The child and the man, the saint and the seraph, are all supposed to be free from sin—they are entirely holy—but the degrees of holiness appertaining to the man and the seraph are supposed to be greater than those appertaining to the child and the saint ; because the powers of the former exceed those of the latter ! But let us not be deceived by the sound and confusion of words without knowledge. What has the strength or maturity of a creature's powers to do with a mere question of fact as to the degree of his sinfulness or sanctification ! What are degrees of sin and holiness, but degrees of conformity or disconformity to the law of God ? And, when this conformity is complete, what is there beyond it in which holiness can be supposed to consist ? Is a child who is perfectly sanctified less holy in degree than a man in the same state, merely because the latter has more bodily stature, greater intellectual strength, or more extensive knowledge ? What, in short, is holiness but freedom from sin ?—and how can a creature who is entirely free from

sin be delivered from it in a still higher degree? The Scriptures call upon us to be holy as God is holy, and perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect; but where would be the possibility of such conformity, if it were of the nature of holiness to rise and fall according to the powers of the being in whom it resides? In respect to the reach of our powers, we shall never attain to an equality with God; but in respect to holiness, if we are his, we shall be “like him”—as free from the indwelling and defilement of sin—and as entirely conformed to his image, in this respect as was the first man when he “became a living soul,” or as the angels now are who kept their first estate.

As to the meaning of the word “attainable,” when applied to the state described in the preceding remarks, we have no other purpose than to use it in its most obvious and popular sense—as importing the practicability of the thing to which it refers. An attainable thing, is something the attainment of which is practicable; an unattainable thing, is something the attainment of which is not

practicable.—And, on the question which relates to the practicability of attaining to a state of entire sanctification in this life, I feel compelled to join issue, not merely with the professed advocates of the doctrine, but also with some of those who have undertaken to shield the truth from the weapons which in this quarter have been directed against it.

In a recent publication*—the venerable author of which argues in some respects with zeal and ability, as well as with the best spirit, against the doctrine of Perfection—I find it admitted, “that we may render to God the perfect obedience which he requires;” that “we may render perfect obedience, if we apply ourselves to the work as we ought, and fully avail ourselves of the gracious provisions of the Gospel;” “that a proper use of means will secure it;” “that we shall obtain it, if we do what we ought;” “and that, if we fail of obtaining it, truth will require us to say that we might have obtained it.” The author, therefore, admits that Perfection in this life is attainable—

* Woods’ reply to Mahan.

claims for this admission the common consent of evangelical christians—and reserves, as the only ground on which to make his defence, that perfect holiness never is attained in this world as a matter of fact.—Now this I cannot but regard, as virtually giving up the matter in dispute—as yielding in one form what is denied and opposed in another. For if men may render perfect obedience, by a proper use of means, where is the authority for saying they will never do it? Who is authorized to affirm that what they can do they never will accomplish? If it should be said that the difficulty lies in the want of will—that they might do it if they would—but that it never will be done because no one will ever be willing to do it—I reply that this is claiming a knowledge of the future to which no one has any right to pretend. The want of will which is supposed to have existed hitherto in the case of all, may hereafter be removed in the case of some ;—Nay, it is removed in the case of every individual now living who has a place in the family of God. “Thy people,” says

the Psalmist, "shall be willing in the day of thy power." By the grace of God, this important faculty of their mental and moral constitution is so renewed, that "to will is present" with them—they "would do good"—but "how to perform that which is good" is the difficulty which they find. There is something more in the way, therefore, than a mere want of will. But still, it matters not what it is, if it be something which may be surmounted. If it is, who shall say that no man is ever to arise who will surmount it, and go on to perfection? Nay, where is the man now living, who may not expect, in the use of proper means, to do so himself? In short, is it not almost a contradiction in terms, to say, that a thing may be attained, and yet that no one need expect to attain it—that it lies within the reach of all, and yet that in attempting to reach it, there is infallible certainty that all will fail?

I regard it, then, as proper to say that entire sanctification in this life is not an attainable state. My reasons for believing so

may be arranged under the three following heads,

I. It never has been attained.

II. It is no where intimated in the word of God that it either may or will be.

III. To suppose it, is to suppose that which would disagree with a variety of known and acknowledged facts.

I. If a state of entire sanctification ever has been attained, it certainly falls to the lot of those who assert the fact, to prove it by the production of an instance. And where shall such an instance be found? If found at all, it will doubtless be among those distinguished men, "of whom the world was not worthy," who though dead continue to speak in the biography and history of the sacred volume. But to which of their number shall we refer, as presenting the desired specimen?—It is not denied, that there are words and phrases employed in Scripture, which, if understood in the greatest latitude of meaning of which they are susceptible, would imply that not a few both of the Old and New Testament saints were without sin. These are such as

the words “perfect,” “entire,” “complete,” “blameless.” It is said of Noah, Job, and others, that they were perfect—of all Christians, that they are complete—of Zachariah and Elizabeth, that they walked in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But, it is granted on all hands, that these and other terms of similar import are often used in a qualified and restricted sense; and therefore no decisive proof can be drawn from their appearance in this connection. They occur in the sacred writings, as they do in the language of ordinary conversation, as signifying high degrees of excellency, but not absolute perfection. When we say of an individual, “He is a perfect character,” we are never suspected of intending to convey the idea that he is without a fault—that he is an angel as to his moral purity—that he is free from all error in opinion, and all imperfection in the discharge of duty. Instead of this, what we mean to express is, that he is a person of uniformly correct and praiseworthy deportment. His character is well balanced, and, in this sense,

complete—his life is a well regulated life—there is no one respect in which he especially fails—and we therefore apply to him the idea of perfection, and point to him as an example to be imitated by others.

Bearing this in mind, then, we pursue the inquiry—Where shall we find a specimen of entire sanctification among the eminent saints, who still live and speak in the biographies of the sacred volume, whose memorial has not perished, and who “shall be in everlasting remembrance?” Shall we find it in the man of the New Testament, who was “not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles,” who “laboured more abundantly than they all,” and who “resisted unto blood striving against sin?”—I commence with the examination of his case ; because it seems impossible to doubt, in view of what is said of his life and character, that he was intended expressly to be an example to the rest of mankind. The manner of his conversion—the rank which he took as an apostle—his ardent zeal in the cause of his master—the great success which attended his labours—his

wonderful seasons of communion with God and eternal things—his rapture to the third heaven—and his fervent longings to depart and be with Christ—all testify that he was an extraordinary man. He was raised, by the grace of God, to a level above that which was occupied by others, that he might be justified in saying to them, “Be ye followers of me.” Indeed he is the only being in human form—with the single exception of him who was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners”—who, in any part of the Bible, assumes the responsibility of recommending himself as an example to be imitated by others. And, under these circumstances, we may well regard his attainments in the Christian life as attainments that never have been, and probably never will be, surpassed. This, I believe, is neither denied nor doubted by those who plead for perfection in this life; and accordingly to prove that Paul was entirely sanctified, is one of the points to which their efforts are directed. Let us examine this point, with

some attention, and see what the results will be.

In the third chapter of his Epistle to the Philippians, the apostle gives the most extended and minute account of himself, which his writings contain, as to the progress which he had made in his Christian course. He introduces himself to the notice of his readers, as having started in a "race," and as pressing on towards the goal, with a view of securing the prize. He supposes the same circumstances to be present, which distinguished the natural race, as run at the celebration of the ancient games. He supposes his course to be marked out and prescribed in the Gospel:—He regards Jesus Christ as having "apprehended," or laid hold on him, to draw him into this course, and to support and urge him forward in the contest:—He has his eye fixed on a mark, which he calls "the mark for the prize"—a goal which he must reach before the prize could be awarded:—and, in connexion with the mark, is the prize itself—the crown of life—the incorruptible crown, which every winner

in this race will receive, as the reward of his victory. I need not occupy the time of the reader, in showing that “the mark” for this prize is perfection in holiness; because this is the only mark, or termination of his course, to which the Christian is allowed to have respect. This is the only goal, to which he is commanded to run—the only point, at which he is permitted to stop—the only line, beyond which there is nothing more to be acquired or done. As a Christian, there is nothing else which he is bound to do, than to seek and obtain a state of entire conformity to the image and will of God, both in heart and in life. Having arrived at this state, his work is finished—he can run no farther—his obligations are all discharged—he has come up to the mark, and is ready for the prize.

Let it now be considered, that, when this memorable passage was written, the Apostle had been running the race, which he describes, for a period of something like thirty years. He was not far from the point, at which he afterwards said, “I have finished

my course :”—In about three years more, he was to reach the goal, and obtain the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge had promised to give him. And, under these circumstances, what does he say concerning his progress? “Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after”—“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark.” As if he had said—‘After all the progress I have made in the divine life, there are other and still higher attainments before me—I pretend not to have reached the point, at which I am aiming, but only to be approaching it—all that I can claim is, that, instead of being satisfied with past efforts, I am intent upon still higher degrees of proficiency and success.’

Nor is this different from the evidence arising from all the other parts of his life and teaching. He never speaks of himself, in language which implies, that he was without

sin, or had obtained a complete victory over it; but, very often, in such terms as show, that he was put to the necessity of a constant struggle against its temptations and defilements. He unites with the Hebrews in saying, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us"—regarding himself, in common with them, as exposed to the influence of besetting sins. He records, in his second letter to the Corinthians, that his tendency to spiritual pride was such, that there was given to him "a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan, to buffet him." And who can believe, that the sharp contention between him and Barnabas would ever have occurred, if his mind and affections had been in a state of entire sanctification?

But the fullest evidence, on this subject, is to be found in the seventh chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, where his struggles with remaining sin are described at length. He there speaks expressly, of sin, as dwelling in him—of evil, as being present with him—of a law in his members, warring

against the law of his mind, and bringing him into captivity to the law of sin, which was in his members. This testimony, in its terms, is so direct and conclusive, that the only way of evading its force, is to deny that the Apostle is here referring to himself as a christian at all ; and to take the ground, that, although he speaks in the present tense, he means to describe exercises of mind through which he had passed in former times—conflicts with himself, under convictions of sin, which occurred before his conversion. This, accordingly, is the position, so far as I know, of all who contend for sinless perfection in this life. They insist upon the advantage to be derived from the example of Paul, and therefore argue, that, in this account of his spiritual conflicts, he speaks of himself as a sinner “under the law,” and not as a believer “under grace.” But, to say nothing of the violence which is done to the understanding of the common reader, in supposing the apostle to describe past events in the use of the present tense—to say nothing of the absurdity of an unconverted sinner exclaim-

ing, as he does in this passage, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man"—to say nothing of the striking similarity between his language here and in other places in which he speaks, confessedly as a christian, of the flesh lusting against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh—and to say nothing of the fitness of such expressions, to describe the actual exercises of the best and holiest men who have lived in succeeding ages; all these considerations apart, it is enough to decide the question, to bring it into the light of historical facts, concerning which there can be no dispute. Let any candid inquirer look back upon the character and life of this distinguished individual, before his conversion; and see whether, in the progress of his history, there is any place for such a scene as that which is here described—any interval of time, either long or short, during which he was the subject of these distressing contentions with the power of sin. In reference to the whole period of his former life, his testimony concerning himself is, that, "as touching the righteousness which is in the law,"

he was “blameless :” He was not only “an Hebrew of the Hebrews,” but a Pharisee of the Pharisees—an eminent individual among that class of persons, who supposed themselves to be doing their whole duty, and who felt entitled to say, at the very altar of God : ‘ We thank thee, that we are not as other men are !’ In his defence before Agrippa, he says : “ My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews ; which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that, after the most straitest sect of our religion, I lived a Pharisee.” Nor were his self-righteous feelings disturbed, even for a moment, by what he did immediately before his conversion, in persecuting the Church of God. In all that fell out in the progress of that bloody scene, he was guided by what he verily thought within himself he ought to do. In short, it is as clear as any historical fact can possibly be, that up to the very moment at which the light from heaven flashed upon him, on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus, he supposed himself to be an en-

tirely sanctified person. He was then a Perfectionist truly : He not only advocated the doctrine, but regarded himself as its brightest exemplification : He stood as the leader of the only sect of this description which distinguished and disturbed the age in which he lived. How significantly does he allude to the self-complacency of that period, when he says, in the commencement of the passage of which we are now speaking, " I was alive without the law, once !" The " once," of which he speaks is, beyond a doubt, the time which preceded his conversion. During any part of that time, he saw no reason to find fault with his religious character and condition. He was all that he wished to be, and his hopes of heaven were firm and bright. " But, when the commandment came," as it did at the time of his conversion, and brought to his mind a true knowledge of sin, and crucified his hopes of salvation by the deeds of the law, then he abandoned his favourite notion of perfection, as applied either to himself or others, and became a mourner, for the rest of his days, under the consciousness and

burden of indwelling sin. He now saw the spirituality of the law, as contrasted with the carnality of his affections : He saw the field of human obligation and duty to be “ exceeding broad :” and he had a disposition to occupy and improve it. But, while engaged in his best and most successful efforts, he found, in many instances and respects, that when he would do good evil was present with him ; that the good which he would, that he did not ; and that the evil which he would not, that he did ; and that all this was to be referred to the remaining corruption of a nature sanctified only in part ; “ now, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.” So that, instead of regarding himself as having nothing more to do in the warfare against sin, he could exclaim from the depths of his bitter experience, “ O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?”

We pass, now, from the case of Paul, and extend our search after the specimen of entire sanctification, to some of the other eminent saints, who are referred to as examples

in the sacred volume. And if, after him, there are any among whom the object of this search is likely to be found, they must surely be such persons,—as *Noah*, concerning whom it is said, that he was “a just man and perfect in his generations,” or *Job*, of whom the Spirit testifies, that there was “none like him in all the earth,”—or *Abraham*, who sustained the relation of father to all the faithful,—or *Moses*, whom the Lord knew face to face; or *David*, who was the man after God’s own heart; or *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, who “were both righteous,” and of whom we have already spoken, as “walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless.” These are the persons, concerning whom it is said, “Be ye followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.” And yet, there is not one of their number, in regard to whom it is not expressly recorded, that their perfection was a limited or qualified perfection. The perfection of Noah was stained, by the sin of intoxication; and that of Job, by an imprecation upon the day of his birth; Abra-

ham was guilty of prevarication ; Moses spake unadvisedly with his lips ; David fell into the crimes of adultery and murder ; and Zacharias was struck dumb, because he believed not the words of the Lord. It is indeed an instructive and striking fact, that, when we find the record of eminent holiness in the Bible, we generally find over-against it the record of some instance of transgression, as if to remind us, that, “there is not a just man upon earth that doeth good and sinneth not ;” that this world is not the place for unalloyed and uncorrupted piety, and that those who pretend to it, arrogate to themselves, what the best days and the brightest ornaments of the Church of God have never produced.

So far, then, as the scriptural models of faith and holy living are concerned, we think it beyond a doubt, that they present no example of entire sanctification. And, having failed to find such an example among these models, it is scarcely worth while to pursue the inquiry farther. It may not be unimportant, however, to remark in general terms,

that, in relation to entire sanctification, considered as a practical matter, there is a striking coincidence in the experience and views of the most eminent saints in every age. Take up the diary of any one, whom we all acknowledge to have been pre-eminent in holiness; and, in turning over its pages, you will find, that, as the piety of the individual rises, his sense of remaining sin becomes deeper and more afflicting. The seasons of his closet communion with God, are the seasons in which he sees most in himself to be repented of and subdued. The nearer he comes to the throne, the lower he lies in confession and self-abasement. It is not when he hears of God by the hearing of the ear, but when his eye seeth Him, that he abhors himself and repents in dust and in ashes. In short, it is when his devotion burns with the brightest and purest flame, that he has the clearest insight into the depravity of his own nature: So that, while he is sensible of an increase of grace, he is equally sensible that more grace is still needed to carry on and complete his deliverance from sin.

As the result, then, of this inquiry into the facts of the case, it is fair to infer, that a state of entire sanctification in this life has never been attained. This I acknowledge, however, does not of itself settle the question as to whether it may be attained. The proof, thus far, is merely presumptive. We infer that it may not, from the fact, that, thus far, it has not been, without touching the question of probability, as to the future. But we proceed, now, to remark

II. That while a state of entire sanctification in this life never has been attained, it is no where declared or intimated in the word of God, in any way, that it either *may* or *will* be.

And here, I take occasion to say, as under the former particular: If there is an intimation to this effect in the Bible, either direct or implied, it behoves those who make the assertion to prove it by the production of an instance. No doubt they do produce, what they themselves regard as satisfactory; but let us examine the ground of their claim to

success in this department, with some degree of particularity and care.

I have already said, that no stress is to be laid, in this discussion, on the mere use of the words “perfect,” “complete,” and others of similar character; because the latitude of meaning to be assigned to such terms, is confessedly various, according to the connexion in which they are found. If words and phrases, out of their connexion, were admitted as proof, it would be easy, not only to establish the doctrine of sinless perfection, considered as an attainable state, but also to show that all Christians are perfect, and must be so from the necessity of the case. For what can be plainer than the language of the Apostle John, when he says, “whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin,”—nay more, “his seed remaineth in him and he cannot sin, because he is born of God?” If this passage, taken by itself, were susceptible of any meaning, it would be, that regeneration draws after it, not merely the probability, but the necessity of entire freedom from sin. And, as none would be willing to re-

ceive this interpretation, we must all appreciate the importance of understanding words and phrases in their connexion, and of ascertaining the meaning of passages, by comparing scripture with scripture, before we are hasty in deciding upon the instruction which they are intended to convey.

It must be conceded, however, that the advocates of the error we are now opposing, do not depend much upon proof derived from express declarations of scripture. Their mode of reaching what the scriptures are supposed to teach, is rather by inference. And the main facts and circumstances, from which the inference is drawn, we proceed to notice.

It is said that God commands us to be perfect ; and that this he would not do, unless perfection in this life were attainable,—and attainable, at any time, at which the command exists. But, admitting the premise, in this argument, does the conclusion follow ? God, as we have seen, can require nothing less than perfection ; because nothing else would answer to the demands of his immutable law. He can make no abatement

here, on account of any changes which occur in our condition ; for this would be to relinquish his rights as moral Governor, and make sin and holiness matters of mere accident and circumstance. We, in common with all rational and moral creatures, are therefore required to yield the perfect obedience which his law demands. But to say, that, by us in our fallen state, such perfection may at any moment be attained ; to say that a creature, who is radically imperfect, whose moral constitution is diseased, defiled, and debilitated by sin, who is “without strength” and “compassed with infirmity,” whose “whole head is sick and whose whole heart is faint,” and in whom “there is no soundness from the sole of the foot even unto the head, but wounds and bruises and putrifying sores ;” to say that such a creature may start, at will, from his death in trespasses and sins, into a state of immaculate purity, is to utter what a reflecting person can hardly be supposed to believe. And yet this is the absurdity to which the argument in question would conduct us. It may be briefly stated,

in the following manner : God commands us, now and at all times, to be perfect—but he would not command that, which may not be done—therefore perfection is, to us, at this moment, an attainable state. To substitute some future day, for the present moment, might seem to abate the absurdity a little ; but it would not essentially alter its nature. The reasoning is, that the existence of a command implies the practicability of the thing commanded ; and, as there is no time at which the command to be perfect does not exist, so there is no time at which an individual may not yield obedience to the last tittle of what it requires.

If it should be said, that, although we cannot rise to a state of perfect obedience of ourselves, yet, if we ask it aright, God will bestow the blessing upon us ; I answer, that this must depend altogether upon what, in relation to this point, he has promised to do. All that he has promised, he will undoubtedly perform ; and, if there is a passage in the Bible which contains the promise of entire sanctification in this life, I acknowledge that

the whole controversy is thereby decided. But where is such a passage to be found? As an example of the class of passages on which the main reliance is placed, we are referred to the language of God by the prophet Ezekiel, when he says: "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you," Ezek. xxxvi. 25. We are also referred to Deut. xxx. 6: "And the Lord thy God will circumcise thy heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart, and with all thy soul;" and to Jer. l. 20: "In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none, and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found."

On these passages, I remark, in the first place, that the bare circumstance of going so far back for the main proof, on such a point as this, is of itself suspicious. I have often observed, that new forms of error are apt to shun the light of the New Testament, and establish themselves behind words and

phrases, which occur in the more enigmatical, and therefore doubtful language of the Old. If there are promises of entire sanctification in this life, in any part of the Bible, where may we expect to find them in the greatest number and variety? Is it in the prophetic and figurative language of the prophets? Or is it in the plainer statements of our Saviour and his apostles? Is not the doctrine, in the view of its friends, an especial development and blessing of the New Covenant? And is it not, under the effusion of the Spirit "in the latter days," that they expect it to be the most extensively realized? In short, if it filled the eyes of those who lived under a darker dispensation, may we not expect to hear of it, very often, and without a figure, from those who could say, "the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth?" Yet, in referring to a list of promises, drawn by the hand of a professed advocate of the doctrine, I find, out of five passages produced, four from the prophetic parts of the Old Testament, and only one from the New, while the one from the New

does not contain a promise, but only a prayer, which is supposed to involve a promise. I submit to the candid reader, whether this is not a virtual acknowledgment, that promises of the kind referred to are few in number and difficult to be found.

But, in the second place, if we grant, that the passages quoted above do relate to all believers, and are to be understood in the most unrestricted sense, as applicable to their condition in the present life, then they will prove nothing, by proving too much. The promises which they contain, it will be seen, are absolute in their terms, and general as to the persons to whom they are addressed. The veracity of the Promiser is pledged for their fulfilment ; and what they contemplate in relation to one, they contemplate in relation to all. But that all Israel, in the spiritual sense, are cleansed from all their filthiness , and from all their idols in the present life, is no more admitted by the friends of the error, on which we are now remarking, than by those who oppose it. We must either acknowledge, therefore, that the promises have

failed, and that God is unfaithful, or concede that sinless perfection in this world is not the precise thing to which these promises refer.

In the third place, as to the true sense of the passages in question, it is clearly to this amount, that sanctification is one of the great blessings of the "new covenant," into which God was to enter with the seed of Israel and Judah, and which is none other than the covenant of grace; that he has engaged to confer this blessing upon all with whom this covenant is established; and that he will bestow it, in no imperfect or partial measure, but fully and perfectly; to such a degree, that, when their sins are sought for, they shall not be found. In this view, the promises which they contain, are "exceeding great and precious"; they secure to every believer, beyond all peradventure or possibility of failure, a perfect deliverance from the existence and pollution of sin. But, as to the time, at which this deliverance is to be consummated, they contain no specification, and express no opinion. They are

just as consistent with the views of those, who suppose that sanctification is never entire in the present life, as with the views of those who believe that it is. Nor are there any promises in the Bible, relating to this subject, to which the same remark will not apply. There are many, indeed, which contemplate the perfect holiness of believers, but it is of believers in common, and without any limitation to this world as the time and place. The work is begun here, and carried on, under different circumstances, as well as with various degrees of rapidity. Ere long it will be completed ; but that any are to realize this completion, during the present life, is more than any promise of God has authorized us to expect.

But, again ; it is said, that the attainableness of the state in question may be inferred, from the abundant provision, which is made in the Gospel, for the sanctification of those who embrace it. The provision, it is argued, is “perfect and entire, wanting nothing ;” and, this being the case, it is supposed, that a proper use of such provision will infallibly

lead to the desired result. But what are we to understand here by the word provision? There are only two things, in relation to sanctification, to which it can be supposed to refer; and these are, the agent who does the work, and the means which are employed in carrying it on. Both these are necessary, but in different senses. The agent by whose efficiency the work is commenced, carried on, and completed, is necessary in the absolute sense; because, without such an agent, it could not be done. But means are necessary, only as a part of the prescribed and appointed plan. We could conceive of the work, as done without them; but they are instituted, as the way in which we are to expect it, under ordinary circumstances, to be performed. Now, so far as the provision in question is a mere provision of means, it will not be contended, that any thing certain can be inferred, as to the progress of the work, and the time of its completion. The means may exist, and be known, without being applied in such a way as to secure the end; they are nothing in themselves, and become

effectual, only as they are overruled and blessed. And again, if the provision be supposed to refer to the efficient Agent in sanctification, then we say, that, while the provision of the Gospel is abundant—while the Holy Spirit, who is sent into the world for this purpose, is fully able to accomplish the work—it is no legitimate inference from this to affirm, that he will bring it to perfection during the present life. Whether he will or not, must depend altogether upon himself. And therefore the question returns: Has he promised in any part of his word, that he will bring it to maturity in the present state? That no such promise can be found, we have already shown. And, until something to this effect is produced, no argument, founded on the provisions of the Gospel, can be regarded as worthy of farther notice.

Another argument for entire sanctification in this life, is attempted to be derived from the prayers, which are recorded in Scripture,—prayers in which, such a state is evidently the matter of petition—and which are supposed to be proper for all Christians,

when praying either for themselves or others. It is said, for instance, that Epaphras prayed, on behalf of the Colossians, that they might “stand perfect and complete in all the will of God ;” that Paul prayed for the Hebrews, that the great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, would make them “perfect in every good work to do his will ;” that the same apostle said, in his supplications for the Thessalonians, “the very God of peace sanctify you wholly : and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” and that such prayers would not have been offered by such men, unless the thing which they asked had been something which they expected to receive.

But, in this statement of the case, while there is much that is true, as well as plausible, there is something also which is radically fallacious. In reference to the words “perfect” and “complete,” as occurring in these prayers, I might repeat the remark already made, that no decisive proof can be derived

from them. But, let it now be granted, that prayers for perfection in holiness are scriptural and proper. That they are so, all evangelical Christians admit. It is admitted, too, that all such prayers, if offered in sincerity will be answered. But the question to be determined is, when will they be answered? Will the answer come at the very moment, at which the prayer is offered? will it come, in the course of a day? or in the progress of a year? will it come, in all its fulness, at any other specified or particular time? or will it come, partly at one time and partly at another—by little and little—like the advance of vegetation—like the going forth of the morning—like the coming of the rain? The truth is, that nothing is more common, than for God to allow long spaces to intervene, between the offering of acceptable prayers and the bestowment of the answer. How long did the Patriarchs and Prophets pray for the coming of the Messiah, before the answer was received? And, since the opening of the Christian dispensation, as well as before, how many true and fervent

prayers have been offered for the coming of the Millenium, which is still in prospect? These prayers are heard, and will be answered. But the plans of God are not like the plans of men. His views are more comprehensive; He moves in a wider sphere; and long periods of time are occupied in bringing his works to maturity. But what appears to us to be of moment, here, is nothing to him. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." He will answer the prayers of his people, in his own time; but he will answer them in such a way, as to make them know, that he is a sovereign in the selection of the time, as well as in the bestowment of the gift. In their present experience, in relation to this point, there is great variety. There are some cases, in which he confers blessings upon them before they pray; there are others, in which he answers them, at the very time, at which they are speaking; there are others, again, in which he declines giving them what they ask, and bestows upon them something else, which is far better; and there

are still others, in which he begins to answer them at once, but occupies a considerable portion of time in doing all that he intends. The last of these, is the course which he is now pursuing, in respect to the prayers of true Christians for the universal diffusion of the Gospel. He has begun to answer them; but "the set time" for answering them fully, has not yet arrived. And thus it is, in respect to their prayers for entire holiness, as offered either for themselves or others. They are not only heard, but their desires are fulfilled in part. The work has been commenced and is going forward. The period of the fulfilment is in progress; but "the time of the end" is yet to come. They are enabled, by the grace of God, more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. And, ere long, their triumph over sin and its influences will be complete. But, that this will occur, the next moment, during the next day, in the course of a year, or at any point short of the termination of the present life, we are no where authorized to affirm.

If the minds of any should still labour, in

view of the very strong language, which is used by Paul in his prayer for the Thessalonians, let them attend for a moment to a critical examination of its meaning. It represents him, as asking, not only that God would sanctify them wholly, but that their whole soul, body, and spirit might be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is not to be doubted, that this language is susceptible of being so interpreted as to make it express his desire, that they might, in the first place, be brought into a state of perfect sanctification, and then be kept in that state until the coming of the Saviour to remove them at death. But the difficulty attending this interpretation, to the advocate of Perfection, is, that, if admitted to be true, it proves too much. In words immediately following the prayer, the Apostle adds, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." This was an absolute and unconditional promise, in which the faithfulness of God was pledged, in the most formal and solemn manner, for the bestowment of what the prayer contemplated upon

all those on whose behalf it was offered. "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also *will* do it." There could be no failure, in the case of any one of their number whom God had effectually called; so that if sinless perfection in this world was the thing which the prayer contemplated, it follows that this perfection was attained by all the true followers of Christ in Thessalonica,—which is more than the advocates of the doctrine themselves would be willing to admit.

The truth undoubtedly is, that, while the Apostle prays, in the first clause of this passage, for the entire sanctification of those to whom he wrote, without any limitation as to time, he prays, in the second clause, for their preservation in a state of justification, up to a point of time which he specifies. He uses the word "blameless," not as opposed to a state of pollution but as opposed to a state of condemnation. Their whole soul and body and spirit, before their conversion, had been under the condemning sentence of the divine law. But, having embraced the Gospel, they were pardoned—their liability

to punishment was removed—they had passed, in this sense, from death unto life. And now, while he prays that their sanctification may be carried on and completed, he also prays that they may be kept in their pardoned and justified state until the arrival of the great day of acquittal—when they are to be brought into the presence of the universal Judge, to be openly accepted and acknowledged as his, and invited to take possession of the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.

We cannot accept it as true, therefore, that the attainableness of entire sanctification can be fairly inferred, either from the commands, the promises, the provisions of the Gospel, or from any of the prayers which are there recorded. And, if the Bible uses language, in any other relation, from which it is pretended that such an inference may be drawn, I am not aware of its existence. I pass, therefore, to shew,

III. That to suppose the state in question to be attainable, would be to suppose that,

which would *disagree* with a variety of *known* and *acknowledged facts*.

1. It is a fact, that the strongest representation of *Christian experience and practice*, which are found in the Bible, are those which expressly exclude the notion of sinless perfection in this life, and include the idea of an onward movement to still higher degrees of proficiency and success. You may look at the Christian, at any point, at which these representations place him, and you will find, that, instead of having arrived at the mark, he is only pressing towards it ; he is not standing still, but advancing ; his attitude and motions are those of one, who is forgetting things which are behind and reaching forth to those which are still before.

Take, in illustration of this thought, *the similitudes* employed by our Saviour, to shadow forth the advancement of the kingdom of God, both in the world in general, and in the hearts of believers in particular. It is like “a grain of mustard-seed,” which, when planted, is the smallest of all seeds ; but which increases, by an onward growth,

until it becomes so large as to accommodate the birds of the air with nests. Again, "it is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal," and which diffused its influence, by a gradual progress, from one part of the general mass to another, until the whole was leavened. And, once more, it is like any of the ordinary seeds, which are cast into the ground, with a view to the raising of a crop. They bring forth, not by an instantaneous, or very speedy production, but "first the blade, then the ear, and, after that, the full corn in the ear." And, in regard to this latter similitude, it is especially in point to remark, that the Author of the parable interposes the declaration, that, "when fruit is brought forth, immediately the husbandman putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come." There is no time permitted to elapse, between the ripening and the ingathering of the fruit. The one event follows the other, not only in the order of nature, but without an interval. And thus, the great Teacher would have us to understand, it will ever be in the kingdom of

grace. When the plants of righteousness have grown to maturity, they will no longer be permitted to stand in the open field of the present world. The purpose of their growth, here, will then be answered; and, without any farther delay, they will be gathered into the garner of God.

But, there are other figurative representations of the Christian life, than those which were employed by our Saviour. "The path of the just," says Solomon, "is as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day." And what does this imply, but a continued progression, up to the very time at which the perfect day is ushered in? But, surely, "the perfect day" is not realized in this world of comparative darkness and misery! It is certainly, not here, that the shades are all dispersed, and the full tide of Divine light and glory is poured upon the soul! For the consummation, intended by this image, we must wait, until we reach the threshold of eternity—until we have passed the Jordan of death—until we have fallen asleep, as to this world, and opened our eyes

upon the brighter visions of another. And, if this is so, it follows, that, up to the moment of this important change, the light of our Christian course is expected to shine with increasing brightness:—There is no point at which we are permitted to stop—no measure of attainment beyond which we are not expected to go.

The same idea attaches to the figures of Christian experience, which are drawn from the ideas of a warfare, a race, a pilgrimage. These are all constructed upon the supposition of an onward movement. And, where the line of this movement terminates, there the Christian life ends and the results are exhibited. As soon as the warfare terminates in victory over the last enemy, the victor's crown is awarded and placed upon his head; as soon as the racer reaches the goal, or comes up to the mark, he receives the prize; and, as soon as the pilgrim has passed over the last stage of his journey, his fatigues are all over, and he enters upon his rest. The very nature of the similitudes is such, as to forbid the supposition, that when the christian has

arrived at perfection, he will be kept any longer from the possession and enjoyment of his reward.

And if, from the figurative language of the Bible, we go to its plainer and more simple statements, what do we hear? Do we hear the note of congratulation at having "already attained," or at being "already perfect"? Are Christians ever addressed as those who may be supposed to have received the blessing of entire sanctification? Are they invited, to turn around and rejoice over the dying struggles of their last enemy, and to lay aside their armour, because the war is ended? Or are their ears saluted, by the never-ceasing return of exhortations and commands, to be up and doing, to walk circumspectly, to redeem the time, to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, to grow in grace, to follow holiness, and to abound more and more in love and good works? There is no degree of proficiency, in the divine life, beyond which these injunctions are not reiterated and pressed. They are addressed, in common, to the whole

Christian family. And, if there be a class of persons, to whom they do not apply, they are a class, to whom no place is assigned in the sacred writings; with whom inspired men had formed no acquaintance; and to whom none of their counsels and exhortations were directed.

2. It is a fact that there is no degree of piety or holy living, in this world, beyond which Christians are exempted from afflictions and trials; such exemption is neither contemplated in the word of God, nor realized in actual experience; and yet, nothing short of this, would be suitable to a state of entire sanctification.

The only revealed purpose of affliction, in the case of believers, is to promote their sanctification. The Lord “doth not afflict willingly, or grieve the children of men,” but “for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.” And, as to the universal and unceasing application of this means of discipline, an apostle remarks—“Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If

ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he, whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons.” “As many as I love,” says the exalted Saviour, “I rebuke and chasten.”

And who doubts, that the fact, as thus stated, is a fair representation of what occurs in the life of every Christian, up to the moment of his release from the body? For where is the “son” to be found whom the father “chasteneth not,” and whom he does not continue to chasten as long as he lives? We have never seen him, in our day; nor is there any allusion to him, in the records of the past. “We, that are in this tabernacle, do groan, being burdened”—“We, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves, groan within ourselves.” All believers, without regard to the degrees of their sanctification, are thus affected. They groan under the pressure, which is still upon them in the trial of their faith. “Our light affliction,” is a phrase which they have fre-

quent occasion to pronounce ; “ the sufferings of this present time,” are things with which they have a daily and an intimate acquaintance.

Here, then, is a chain of truths, inseparably connected ; and, by necessity, leading to the conclusion, that there is no sinless perfection in the present world. All Christians are subjected, while here, to chastisements ;—All chastisements, are from the hand of God ;—The only present object which God has in view, in chastising his people, is to make them more holy ;—He cannot be supposed to chastise them “ willingly,” or without a reason ;—And hence it follows, that none of their number are so holy as to be beyond the necessity of a still higher degree of sanctification. The argument is perfect, and the conclusion so legitimate, that it would seem impossible for a candid mind to evade it, or be insensible to its force. We must admit that afflictions are not from God ; or that he has some other object in view, in afflicting his people, than to increase their holiness ; or else acknowledge, that they are

never perfectly sanctified during “the time of their sojourning here.”

Besides: there is an incongruity, in the very thought, of a perfectly sinless being remaining in a state of suffering. All suffering, of every kind, is the associate of sin. If sin had not entered the world, there would have been no affliction. In heaven, there will be no suffering, because there will be no sin. In hell, all will be misery, because sin will reign, without interruption or restraint. And why should this connexion between sin and suffering on the one hand, and holiness and happiness on the other, which is so conspicuous every where else, be dispensed with, in the present experience of the people of God? If they are without sin, does not consistency seem to require, that they should be exempted from the evils which sin produces? If the heavenly state is begun in them, as to its holiness, why not, also, as to its happiness? If all the stains, which sin had attached to their nature, have been washed away, is it not a wrong representation of their character, to present them, as living still upon “the

bread of adversity and the water of affliction”?

3. It is a fact, that all Christians are directed to use the means of sanctification, as long as they live ; there is no degree of holiness, in this life, supposed, in the word of God, to be attainable, beyond which, they are represented as needless.

This will appear, if we consider what the means of sanctification are, and attend to the style and obvious import of those parts of Scripture, in which their use is enjoined. They are such as private and social prayer ; the reading of the word of God, and of the writings of good and gifted men, which have a tendency to illustrate and apply its truths ; attendance upon the preaching of the Gospel, and the other public ordinances of religion ; Christian fellowship and counsel, together with mutual watchfulness, admonition, and reproof. There are others, indeed, which might be mentioned ; for there is nothing, to which the Christian stands related, which is not overruled as the means of his advancement in holiness. But I specify

these, because they are means in the direct and exclusive sense. To promote our sanctification, is the great and main object which they have in view.

Now what is the language, in which the Scriptures prescribe and enjoin the use of these means, considered as to the extent of its application? Is it guarded by any restrictions or limitations, as if there might be some to whom it could not apply? In directing Christians, to meditate and pray, to search the scriptures, and attend upon the ministry of the word and ordinances, does it contemplate a point of time, or a degree of piety, at which these things will cease to be necessary or beneficial? Does it ever allude to a highly favored number, either great or small, who may stand erect, and thank God that they are not as others, while the imperfect around them are bowing the knee, in penitence, confession, and supplication? Does it give permission to some, to stay away from the house of God, while others frequent it, or to turn their backs upon the table of the Lord, while others are gathering around it, to obtain re-

freshment and strength? That any such distinction is recognized in Scripture, I am well aware, is neither pretended nor supposed. It is granted, on all hands, that what is said in reference to the means of growth in grace, is said to all believers, without distinction. And, from this admitted fact, we infer, that the sanctification of every one is less than perfect. For why use the means, if the end is already obtained? Why wait upon God, and ask him to renew our strength, if we have already arrived at the measure of the stature of perfect men? Why pray for the Holy Spirit, if the work of the Spirit, in us, is already completed? And why look into the glass of the written, or preached word, if we are already changed into the image, which it reflects, and have put on the highest degree of the glory, which that image exhibits?

In view of the Christian life, considered as a warfare, believers are exhorted, in common, to “fight the good fight of faith”—to “put on the whole armour of God”—to “be sober”—to “stand fast” and quit themselves like men—having their “loins girt about

with truth"—their "feet shod with the preparation of the Gospel of peace"—and their whole persons guarded, by "the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." And do these sound like addresses to an army, some of whom have fought all their battles, have conquered all their enemies, have placed their feet upon the neck of their last foe, and are ready to begin the celebration of the victory? Or, do they proceed upon the supposition, that the war is still in progress—that the armour is still needed—and, that other triumphs over the foe, are still to be sought?

4. It is a fact, that, in the present world, there are none who either do or can arrive at a perfect knowledge of the truth; and as sanctification is through the truth, it is not easy to see, under these circumstances, how any can be perfectly holy.

I know, indeed, that the Spirit of God is promised, as a guide into all truth; and, so far as all revealed truth is concerned, this promise is sure, and all Christians have reason to pray for its fulfilment, in faith and

hope. But, there are other views of truth, than those which are yet revealed, which are to have an effect upon our spiritual condition. We know as much now, as is necessary to answer the purposes of God, in reference to our existence here; and, doubtless, if he had contemplated our perfect conformity to his image in this world, he would have revealed to us still more. But the present is, to us, in all respects, an imperfect state;—He has not designed it to be otherwise;—His gracious method of restoring us to himself, takes effect here, but is not consummated;—what we enjoy now, is “the first fruits”—“the harvest” is still in prospect. In short, his plan requires, that earth and heaven, instead of meeting and blending, should be kept far distant from each other, in our conceptions. And this is not more true, in any respect, than in reference to the extent of our knowledge. In the comparisons of earth with heaven, which are drawn in scripture, there is great prominence given to this consideration;—here, “we know in part”—“we prophecy in part”—“we see, through a glass,

darkly”—“What I do,” said the Saviour, “thou knowest not now.” But, in heaven, “that, which is perfect,” will have come—“that, which is in part, shall be done away”—we shall see, “face to face,” and know, even as, also, we are known. Earth is a place of comparative obscurity; but, of heaven, it is said—“there shall be no night there.”

And, that the perfection of our knowledge, in heaven, will have some connexion with our perfect conformity to the image of God, is, not obscurely, intimated, by an apostle, when he says, “we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” The whole force of this passage depends upon the supposition, that our likeness to him, in this world, is not complete. It is a passage, too, which is applicable to all believers, without distinction. It states a general fact, which is to be realized in the experience of every Christian, when he ceases to walk by faith, and enters the region of sight. He will, then, have a knowledge of God and eternal things, which will be the knowledge of an eye-witness, and

which will altogether surpass the measure and accuracy of his information here. And this knowledge will have an assimilating effect—it will produce a likeness between him and the Divine nature. And what is this, but to say, in other language, that it will have the effect of completing his sanctification? For what is likeness to God, but perfection in holiness?

It may be difficult, indeed, for us, to foresee and explain the manner, in which the knowledge of heaven will produce the effect, which is thus ascribed to it; but, to do this is not necessary to our present purpose. It were easy to indulge in imagination and conjecture; but where revelation does not speak, it becomes us to be silent. All that concerns us, now, is a simple matter of fact; and, in this view, the passage referred to is conclusive. It makes our perfect likeness to God, in the person of his Son, depend upon a measure of knowledge, which we cannot have, until we “see him as he is.”

5. It is a fact, that, while Christians remain

in the present world, they will have corruptible bodies ; this part of their nature will remain, substantially, as it was, at the commencement of their Christian course ; and, in such a connexion, it is not to be expected, that they will arrive at a state of entire sanctification.

The union between the body and the soul, and the nature and extent of their influence, the one upon the other, I am well aware, are intricate, and, in many respects, inexplicable subjects. The fact itself, however, that their reciprocal influence is not only real and great, but constant and necessary, all will admit. And, in view of this influence, as recognized in scripture and felt in the experience of all, I cannot doubt, that the dissolution of the body, as followed by its resurrection, is one of the appointed means of sanctification. As polluted by sin, it is like the leprous house, under the law of Moses,—the infection has extended, to every part,—the “stones,” the “timber,” and the “mortar,” are all defiled,—and there is no way of removing the evil,

but by demolishing the entire structure ; it must be taken down, and carried forth “ out of the city, into an unclean place,” before the work of purification will be complete.

If a corruptible body were consistent with a perfectly sanctified state of the soul, in this world, why might it not be consistent with the same state, in the world to come ? And why, on this supposition, is it necessary that believers should die ? Why are they not removed to heaven, as they are ? All that they need, to render them perfectly happy, is entire deliverance from the infection and pollution of sin. And, if this can be effected, without a change in the body, why not allow it to remain as it is ? If it should be said, in reply to this, that “ flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,” I inquire : Why ? Surely, not on account of any natural impossibility, which exists in the case. It will hardly be contended, that such a material structure as the human body, could not be taken to heaven, and dwell there, if there were nothing about it inconsistent with a

state of perfect holiness. It might be immortal, according to its present structure, as well as any other, if such were the will of God concerning it. It might be exempted, too, from all infirmity and suffering, without any radical alteration, in its form, or qualities. But, the truth is, that it cannot go to heaven because it is defiled—it is a “body of sin”—and must, therefore, be “sown in corruption,” that it may be “raised in incorruption.” As thus renewed and purified, by death, it will be a fit companion for the sanctified spirit; the whole nature will, then, be entirely cleansed; and nothing will remain, to overcloud the prospect of pure, perfect, and everlasting enjoyment.

The idea of a perfectly holy spirit, remaining in connexion with a corruptible body, would present an incongruity, to which no parallel could be found in any of the other arrangements, or works of God. It is not only true, that his plans are wise, but also, that their wisdom can be generally seen, and appreciated, by the candid and careful ob-

server. But, who could regard it as fit or reasonable, that, after the souls of believers are delivered from the last taint of corruption, they should still be confined to such a body as this? As an apostle describes it, it is a "vile" body—a body, possessing many properties, in view of which, we have reason to be humbled—a body, distinguished by great infirmity, and weakness—easily brought into a state of languor and fatigue—subject to innumerable ills and distresses—furnishing many occasions of temptation to sin—and acting as a constant weight, upon the upward tendencies, and movements of the soul. Surely, when the work of sanctification upon the soul is done, God will provide it with a better place of residence than this. It cannot be, that he will leave it, any longer, in such a situation—to "groan, being burdened"—to endure the lustings of the flesh—to be annoyed by the motions of sin, which proceed from the members—and to pass through successive stages and scenes, of disease and pain. Instead of this, it is far more consis-

tent, to believe, that, when perfectly delivered from sin, it will be emancipated at once—will put off the tabernacle in which it has lived, while sojourning in this vale of tears—and rise to the mount, in which it is to be “clothed upon” with another and a better “house, which is from heaven.”

If it should occur here, in the form of an objection to the view just presented, that Jesus Christ was perfectly holy, while he tabernacled in a human body, it is only necessary to say that the cases are not parallel; because his body was not polluted by sin. It was not sinful flesh, but only “the likeness of sinful flesh,” in which he was made. God did not suffer his “Holy One to see corruption.” He assumed our nature, as far as this could be done, “without sin”; and, that a difference might exist between his nature and ours, in respect to sin, he was not the offspring of man by ordinary generation. The circumstances attending his introduction into the world, were peculiar. He came on a special visitation of grace and

good-will to men ; and he came in such a way, as to bear their griefs and carry their sorrows, without participating, personally, in any of their corruptions, either in body or mind.

In addition to the facts, thus far enumerated, there are others which might be introduced ; but these are sufficient for our present purpose. They are facts, which appear to us, to be incompatible with perfect freedom from sin. And we therefore conclude, that entire sanctification in this life, is not contemplated, as an attainable state, in the scheme of human redemption. The work of renewing our fallen nature to holiness, is commenced and continued here, but not completed. The period through which its performance extends, is from the moment of regeneration, "till the day of Jesus Christ." It is not the plan or purpose of God, to bring it to maturity sooner. And accordingly, no instance of such maturity can be produced from the records of the past ; there is no

reason for expecting it to be derived from any intimations which are contained in Scripture; and the incongruity between it and other acknowledged facts, would be such as to invade, and, in respect to this point, to destroy, the analogy of faith.

PART III.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS.



It is strongly objected, by the advocates of perfection, to the view presented in this discussion, that its practical tendencies cannot be otherwise than injurious; that it must have the effect, of lowering the standard of piety, of cutting the nerves of exertion, and of producing a dwarfish and doubtful state of religion in the church, instead of those high and bright illustrations of the power of godliness, which all should desire to see. And, if the ground, taken in this objection, were tenable; if it could be shown, either from facts in the case, or by other sufficient reasons, that the doctrine here maintained, is less favourable to holy living, than the

principles of those who oppose it—we should feel bound to surrender our position, and acknowledge our mistake. The test by which we desire every article of our faith to be tried, is that furnished by our Saviour, when he says, “by their fruits ye shall know them.” This is the language of reason, as well as of revelation; and, by its requirements, let every doctrine either stand or fall.

What, then, are the facts, as to the practical effect of the doctrine, maintained in the foregoing discussion?

I reply—to go no farther back—that, beyond dispute, nearly all the active piety, that has glorified God and blessed the world, since the dawn of the Reformation, has been the piety of those by whom this doctrine has been held. It was held by Luther and Melancthon—the latter of whom, with the approbation of the former, drew up a formal protest, against the views of those, who maintain “that a sinless perfection in this life, is attainable.” It has been the doctrine, too, of such men as Owen, and Baxter, and Whitefield, and Brainerd, and Edwards, and Pay-

son, and a thousand others, among the living and the dead, whom the bare suggestion will recall to the recollection of every reader. And who were these, but men “of whom the world was not worthy?”—men, who, by their holy lives and abundant labours, have left an impress upon the Church and the world, which will never be effaced?—men, whose names and virtues will go down to the latest posterity, as affording the brightest illustrations of the power of Divine grace, which have ever been furnished? It may serve a purpose, to say, of such men, that they were unacquainted with the true secret of attaining to eminent holiness—that because they despaired of perfection in this life, they were justly chargeable with making “void the law of God,” by their “traditions”—that they were “slumbering in Antinomian death, or struggling in legal bondage”—but the intelligent Christian will not be likely to follow this new light, in preference to the light of their illustrious example. Their record is not only on high, but in the affections of the pious on earth. And

their memory, while time shall last, will be “a savour of life unto life.”

But, while the holiest and most efficient men, whom the world has ever seen, have been unbelievers in the doctrine of perfection, what has been the fact, where this doctrine has prevailed? That many eminent Christians have held the doctrine of a modified perfection is, indeed, true; and I refer, in this remark, especially, to the “Christian Perfection” of Wesley, and others, who have entertained the same views. His perfection, as he himself defines it, “is consistent with infirmities,” with “ignorance,” and “mistakes,” with “thinking wrong” and “doing wrong.” In reality, therefore, it is not perfection, in the sense of entire conformity to the law of God; but something else, to which the word perfection is wrongly applied. Into its practical effects, therefore, we stop not to inquire—although it would be easy to show, that, modified and guarded as it is, it has not been unproductive of evil. But, in regard to perfection, or entire sanctification, as implying sinless obedience to the moral law in

this life, we have no hesitation in affirming, that, where ever it has had “free course,” its moral effects have been bad. It prevailed extensively, in connexion with the rise and early progress of Pelagianism, in the fourth century. It appeared among the first forms of fanaticism, which showed themselves after the commencement of the Reformation. It had no little currency in England, during the seventeenth century. More recently, we have not been without examples of its existence and prevalence, in our own country, at different times, and in different places. And, wherever it has gone, it has carried with it a blighting influence, upon every thing which is “lovely” and “of good report.” It has led, as might naturally be expected, to the neglect of all prayer, whether private, social, or public ; for what has the individual to pray for, who is already perfect ? It has led to an abandonment of the means of grace, in general—to a partial or total neglect of the Sabbath—and to great indifference towards benevolent enterprises of every kind. It has engendered a censorious

and denunciatory spirit, and been accompanied by contempt for the rules and discipline of the church. In short, it is the language of all history and the testimony of all observation, that, where Perfectionism prevails, neither the substance nor the form of religion can long be expected to dwell.

In saying this, I am not ignorant of the attempt which is made, to distinguish between the Perfectionism, which has produced these effects, and the doctrine of entire sanctification, as advocated by some, in our country, who are now living. It is strenuously maintained, that the two things are, not only different from each other, but in direct opposition—having nothing in common. But this is made out, by using the word Perfectionism in a technical sense, and applying it, gratuitously, to represent the abuses, to which we have just referred. ‘These errors and disorders,’ they say, ‘are Perfectionism: but our doctrine of entire sanctification is a different thing.’ But wherein, is it a different thing? In all, that entitles it to be called Perfection, it is the same thing. It

feeds the mind with the notion of entire freedom from sin ; and this is, at once, the essence of the system, and the reason of its danger. Such an appeal, to the self-esteem and self-righteousness of our nature, never can be entertained, without leading to disastrous results. Various circumstances may restrain, or delay the development, for a while ; but, ere long, it will come, with all the evils which follow in its train.

But, without dwelling longer upon the facts in the case, as they present themselves in the history of the past, I proceed to say, that those who anticipate better effects from the doctrine of Perfection than from the common doctrine of Sanctification, reason falsely, as to the principles, from which these effects are expected to proceed. The question is asked, for instance : “ Who would expect an army to fight, with energy, under the impression of inevitable defeat ? ” And this, it is taken for granted, is a parallel case to that of the Christian, who entertains no hope of entire sanctification in the present life. But, is it so ? Has he the impression of inevitable

defeat, because he expects the war to be somewhat protracted? Does he lay down his arms, in despair, because he believes that more than one battle is to be fought? Does he cease from the contest, because he does not anticipate a perfect triumph, until the "last enemy" shall "be destroyed," which "is death?" The truth is, that, on his own principles, he has an expectation of victory, which is qualified by no peradventure;—he anticipates it, with unwavering faith, and with joyful hope;—it is as certain to him, as the love and faithfulness of God can make it;—nay, he has the earnest of it, in his present success;—he has already come off as a conqueror in many a struggle;—he is pursuing his advantage from one battle-field to another; and he has no doubt, that the time is near, when all the armies of the aliens shall be put to flight,

"And death, the last of all his foes,
Lie vanquished at his feet."

So far, therefore, as the certainty of success is concerned, he has the same reason to per-

severe and be active, with those who anticipate a speedier triumph.

Again: it is wrong, in principle, to say, that the hope of success, in order to be an efficient motive, must terminate upon acquisitions to be made within the limits of the present life. This is neither consistent with Scripture, nor in accordance with actual experience. The hope of the apostles and primitive Christians, was a hope, which “entereth into that within the veil;” and, this was the reason why it was an “anchor to the soul.” It tarried upon no amount of holiness or happiness to be acquired upon earth. It overlooked all the scenes of this present time, and seized upon the perfection of another state. It transported its subjects beyond the region where sin and sorrow dwell, and brought them into communion with the inhabitants and felicities of heaven. And this was the true secret of its animating and sustaining influence. It derived its energy from the importance and glory of its object; and this was something entirely above and beyond any degrees of sanctification, to

be anticipated here. "Every man," says an apostle, "that hath this hope in him, purifieth himself." Such a hope will undoubtedly sanctify those in whom it dwells; but a similar influence is never ascribed to any hope, the object of which is to be realized on this side of the grave.

Moreover: it is incorrect to assume, that the Christian derives his strongest impulses to holy living, from direct meditations upon his prospect of success. No doubt, he has "respect unto the recompense of reward," both here and hereafter; and yet, his experience will bear me out in saying, that his heart is never assailed by more irresistible motives to active and entire consecration to God, than when his mind is most fully occupied by other considerations than those which relate immediately to himself. What was it, for instance, that produced and nurtured, that engagedness in religion, which rendered the Apostle Paul "a spectacle to the world?" Men, accustomed to judge on common principles, could not understand him. It was strange, to the popular appre-

hension, that a man should sacrifice his personal ease and worldly interests, to such a degree, and be so willing to encounter persecutions and trials of every sort. And, in what did the true secret of this self-denial and devotedness consist? In what direction did his thoughts lie, when he felt the influence of the violent motive which produced these wonderful effects? Was he taken up with reflections on the degree of proficiency at which he expected to arrive? Was he meditating upon what was likely, in any respect, to accrue to himself? Or, was he transported, for the time, beyond the circle of his personal interests and relations, and invested, on every side, by the overwhelming influence of another motive? Let him answer, in his own language, as he does, in the memorable declaration—"the love of Christ constraineth us!" Here was the main-spring of his activity—this was the secret fire, which burned within, and kept his zeal in a perpetual flame. Standing, with his face towards Calvary, with his eye on the cross, and with his mind intent upon

the compassion and condescension of a suffering Saviour, he was carried beyond himself, and was borne away, by the impulse of a mightier and more generous motive. So it is, in all the higher achievements of the Christian life. It is not, by sitting down to meditate upon the prospect of our perfect sanctification, that we gather the strongest motives to the pursuit of holiness. Our best seasons, both of feeling and action, are those, in which we think least of ourselves, and most, of the love of God, of the compassion of Christ, of the claims of gratitude and duty, and of the beauty and excellency of holiness itself. We are not servants, who work merely for wages, but we are bound to our employment, by love and gratitude to the master, as well as by the happiness we find in the service itself. "We love him, because he first loved us"—his "thoughts" are "precious" to us, and, if we "should count them, they are more in number than the sand"—we delight in his law—we love the habitation of his house—we take pleasure in his worship, and in the fellowship of his people

—his “yoke is easy” to us, and his “burden light.” And, in these considerations, are contained our highest inducements, to persevere in his service, and live to his glory. “For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself; for whether we live, we live unto the Lord, and whether we die, we die unto the Lord; whether we live, therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s.”

Great results are expected from the doctrine of Perfection, by its friends, upon the ground of the high standard of piety, which it is supposed to present. But, the truth is, that it lowers the standard, instead of raising it,—and this is its worst feature. “The law,” says one of its principal advocates, “levels its claims to us as we are.” He contends, that the standard of duty is what the law requires of us, “in our circumstances, with all the ignorance, and debility of body and mind, which have resulted from the intemperance and abuse of the human constitution, through so many generations.” He thinks the standard will be higher, hereafter, “when the human constitution, by the universal preva-

lence of correct and thorough temperance principles may have acquired its pristine health and powers !”—In this way, the rule of holy living is brought down, in the case of each individual, to the level of his depravity and corruption. And, I trust, the time is yet to come, when intelligent Christians will ask for arguments to convince them, that no good effects are to be anticipated, from aiming at such a standard as this. Perfect holiness, according to this rule, would be easily obtained, and worth but little, when acquired. Be it our purpose, to aim at a higher standard—to keep our eye fixed upon a brighter, and more shining mark—to be satisfied with no attainments, until we are “perfect,” as our “Father in heaven is perfect.” And, then, we shall never be without a motive to continued activity, and increasing faithfulness, in the discharge of duty.

It should not be forgotten, in estimating the practical relations of the doctrine we have endeavoured to establish, that the condition of the Christian upon earth, as always contending with remaining sin, is made sub-

servient, in a high degree, to the promotion of the glory of God. He often permits things to occur, with a view to this end, which, in themselves, are evil. It is, only, on this principle, that we can account for the introduction of sin into the world. And, though it might seem desirable, in itself, that the being of sin should be destroyed immediately, in those who become the subjects of the redemption by Christ, yet it is easy to see, in what manner the protraction of the spiritual warfare may tend to honour the perfections of his nature,—especially his power, his wisdom, his faithfulness and truth. His power appears, in carrying on the work, which he has commenced in them, in opposition to so many opposing influences, from within and from without. It is like keeping a spark alive, while surrounded with water, or preventing a bush from being consumed, while it burns in the fire. His wisdom appears, in circumventing the designs of Satan, who still works upon the remaining corruption of his people—in setting bounds to his rage and power,—and in establishing their faith and

hope, in opposition to his devices. And his faithfulness and truth are illustrated, in not forsaking his people, though they serve him so imperfectly—in fulfilling his promises to them, though they are so unstable in their attachment to him—and, in pursuing them with grace and mercy, through all their times of need, though they fail, in so great a measure, to bring forth the fruit which he requires.

Finally : we have reason to be satisfied, with the common doctrine of sanctification, because it is best adapted, to reconcile us to the approach of death, and to endear to us the prospect of the heavenly rest. Death, in itself, is always an unwelcome visitor to the abodes of men ; and strong counterbalancing considerations are necessary to keep down the risings of regret and fear, in the prospect of its coming. If I am to anticipate no greater deliverance from sin, beyond it, than that to which I have already attained, there is nothing, in this view, to reconcile me to its approach. But, if the struggle with this king of terrors is to fix the date of my last contest with sin, as well as with sorrow—if

my “earthly house of this tabernacle” is to be “dissolved,” that I may awake, in the perfect likeness of God—if the purity and glory of heaven, to which I am hastening, is a boundless ocean, in comparison with the narrow streams of holiness and delight, which are circulating here—and, if the only way, from the one to the other, is across the waters of Jordan — then, welcome death ! The thought itself is repulsive, but the association is inspiring ! The valley is dark and gloomy, but the prospect, beyond, is bright and clear ! The advantage to be gained, is greater than the evil to be encountered. And this consideration extracts the sting of death, and enables us to triumph over it, while we fall by its stroke.

THE END.





